



Briefing Paper - Two years anniversary of the EU-Turkey deal

As arrivals increase and violence erupts on Lesbos, MSF calls on Greek and European authorities to end the policy of containment that is endangering vulnerable people's lives

Two years into the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement, MSF teams continue to **witness on a daily basis the price people are paying for these inhumane policies**; the devastating consequences on their health, and in particular on their mental health. As arrivals have already increased with the onset on milder weather, MSF calls on Greek and European authorities to end the policy of containment that is endangering vulnerable people's lives.

Containment policies creating overcrowding and suffering

Geographical restrictions are trapping migrants in the hotspots on the Greek islands in living conditions that do not meet basic humanitarian standards. The situation on the islands remains dramatic; with unacceptable living conditions that are the result of both overcrowding and reductions in services. Whilst the transfers of more than 8,000 people from the islands to the mainland over winter helped to decongest the overcrowded reception facilities, over 5,400 people still live in a camp for 2,300 in Lesbos' Moria; 2,000 in a camp designed to host 700 people in Samos; and around 1,300 in Vial camp in Chios. This overcrowding is only about to get worse as more than 589 people arrived on the islands in the first two weeks of March alone.

Despite the presence of some medical actors, basic medical needs are not being met. Our medical teams working near Moria continue to see many children under 5 years of age suffering from respiratory conditions, diarrhea and skin diseases – some of the children return to the clinic more than once as the living conditions in the camp continuously impact their health. Water and sanitation conditions are sub-standard, with limited access to running water and sanitation facilities, which are often not functional and unhygienic. Our teams also regularly witness incidents of violence, and there are no systems in place to effectively protect the most vulnerable people in the camps.

A continued mental health emergency

Over the last two years, and most recently in a report published in October 2017, our medical teams have warned of a mental health emergency on the islands. In particular, MSF psychologists are concerned that precarious living conditions are exacerbating mental distress and worsening people's mental health conditions.

“As an MSF psychologist I have talked to many people who have lost any hope and dignity, living in complete uncertainty about their future. I have talked to people with mental health problems in need of specialized care, whose condition has deteriorated due to the inhumane living conditions in the camp. People who have survived through torture and imprisonment back in their country and are now re-living this traumatic situation. They tell me: “I have done everything I could to escape violence and abuse and now I am again imprisoned and living in fear and uncertainty”, says Alike Meimaridou, MSF psychologist.



Everything but a success

As the EU celebrates this deal as a success in cutting the number of arrivals onto Greece's shores, it is firmly closing its eyes to its dramatic health and human consequences.

"After two years that the EU-Turkey deal is in force, European leaders still believe that they will prevent more people from trying to reach safety in Europe, by punishing those who actually manage to cross the borders, keeping them in awful living conditions like in the camp in Moria. Well, the deal isn't working, as the authorities are preaching. People keep coming every single day; vulnerable people in need of special protection. Instead, they are stuck living in Moria camp. Who can explain the reason for this?"

Tamim Elnaggar, Cultural mediator in Lesvos.

The people I have provided psychological support are people who have lost all hope for the future, living in constant stress and fear that they will be returned back to their country. Most of them have lived through extremely traumatic experiences back in their countries and suffer from mental health problems related to war and trauma. And living inside the insecure environment of the camp, does not help them to cope with their past experiences. On the contrary it reminds them of the war and the violence they have tried to escape from.

Katerina Psaropoulou, MSF psychologist, Samos

"This is no time to celebrate. Last week, two young men in Moria camp tried to commit suicide by electrocution. On Wednesday last week, riots in Moria erupted once again. That evening and the following day, our teams treated 19 people for panic attacks and due to tear gas, including 11 children and a 6 month old baby. Such scenes have become tragically common on Greece's islands. It is unbearable, and simply outrageous. Let no one dare say this is a success."

Louise Roland Gosselin, MSF HoM in Greece

MSF CALLS

There is an urgent humanitarian imperative to continue stepping up transfers to the mainland. The continued periodic arrivals of asylum seekers on the islands, their extreme vulnerability and the utter ineffectiveness of systems meant to ensure their reception and the identification of vulnerability all indicate an urgent need to lift geographical restrictions and move people to the mainland.

For transfers to the mainland to be able to continue at the necessary rate; relocations to other EU countries should resume, and additional accommodation capacity needs to be created on the mainland. At the moment, lack of accommodation capacity on the mainland is blocking hundreds of people from leaving the islands.

In parallel, the provision of medical and other essential services must be stepped up in order to meet the immediate needs of the people on the islands, and on the mainland. Barriers to access to services (including administrative barriers and lack of translators in national health services) need to be addressed to ensure people access basic service provision.